

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 IO-13 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01  
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /098 W  
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R 101756Z APR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7811  
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 10457

E.O. 11652: GDS  
SUBJECT: INTERCOMMUNAL ISSUES RETURN TO CENTER STAGE

1. PERSONAL STATUS ISSUE, WHICH GOVERNMENT THOUGHT IT HAD PUT TO REST WITH REMOVAL SHEIKH ABU ISMAIL FROM CHAIRMANSHIP PARLIAMENTARY RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, REEMERGED FOLLOWING MARCH 21 RULING OF CAIRO COURT OF APPEALS. AS REPORTED BY GUMHURIYYA APRIL 6 AND 7, APPEALS-COURT OVERTURNED LOWER COURT DECISION IN CASE INVOLVING COPT WHO MARRIED SECOND WIFE--SANS DIVORCE. LOWER COURT HAD INVALIDATED SECOND MARRIAGE AT FIRST WIFE'S REQUEST. ACCORDING PAPER, APPEALS COURT FOUND BOTH MARRIAGES VALID, ACCEPTING PROSECUTIONS ARGUMENT THAT SINGLE LAW SHOULD BE APPLIED IN ALL DISPUTES CONCERNING PERSONAL STATUS, REGARDLESS RELIGION THOSE CONCERNED.

2. SPEAKING TO EMBOFF APRIL 10, BISHOP SAMUEL CONFIRMED COPTIC LEADERSHIP SERIOUSLY UPSET BY DECISION, WHICH THEY REGARD AS INDICATIVE OF TREND TOWARD FURTHER ISLAMITIZATION OF SOCIETY. IF MUSLIM LAW IS TO APPLY ON MATTERS AFFECTING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE, HE ARGUED THAT BY EXTENSION IT COULD BE ENFORCED IN MATTERS CONCERNING INHERITANCE, CHILD CUSTODY, AND  
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ALL OTHER FAMILY MATTERS. THIS WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY ERODE COPTS' POSITION IN SOCIETY.

3. SAUDI CONNECTION. FORCE BEHIND TREND, SAMUEL CLAIM-ED, COMES FROM SAUDI ARABIAN GOVERNMENT, WHICH HE SAID HAS OPENLY CONTRIBUTED 40 MILLION POUNDS TO ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS IN EGYPT. CONCLUDED "ONLY GOD

KNOWS" EXTENT OF COVERT FINANCING. (SAMUEL DID NOT LIST TIME PERIOD DURING WHICH FUNDS SUPPOSEDLY PROVIDED, NOR DID HE DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THOSE GIVEN TO FURTHER AL-AZHAR'S LEGITIMATE ACTIVITIES AND THOSE DEVOTED TO MORE NEFARIOUS ENDS.) AS FURTHER INDICATION SAUDI INVOLVEMENT, SAMUEL DISPLAYED ANTI-COPTIC ARTICLE PRINTED IN FEBRUARY EDITION OF SAUDI VERSION MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD'S DAWA AND ANTI-COPTIC BOOK, ALSO SAID TO BE PUBLISHED WITH SAUDI FINANCIAL BACKING AND DISTRIBUTED FREE IN EGYPT.

4. APPEAL. BISHOP SAMUEL NOTED CHURCH WILL APPEAL ABOVE DECISION TO COURT OF CASSATION, NOTING CHRISTIAN LAW SANCTIONS ONLY ONE WIFE FOR ONE MAN AT ONE TIME. SAID CHURCH'S INITIAL SOUNDINGS WITH HIGHER COURT INDICATE DECISION WILL BE OVERTURNED WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. NEVERTHELESS, SAMUEL SAID COPTS HAVE RAISED MATTER WITH (UNNAMED) SADAT CONFIDANT IN HOPES PRESIDENT WILL INTERVENE, AS HE DID LAST SUMMER, TO EASE INTER-COMMUNAL TENSIONS. AS SAMUEL DESCRIBED MESSAGE, IT COUCHED IN TERMS OF NEED TO MAINTAIN NATIONAL UNITY DURING CURRENT "CRITICAL POLITICAL PERIOD." SAMUEL SAID HE TOLD INTERMEDIARY THAT ISLAMIC PRESSURES ARE MAKING HIS COMMUNITY EXTREMELY UNEASY AND MANY, PARTICULARLY YOUNG, FEEL THEY HAVE LITTLE STAKE IN EGYPTIAN SOCIETY. HE INDICATED HE ASKED PRESIDENT TO

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REIN IN ISLAMIC SOCIETIES ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, WHERE THEY HAVE ENJOYED MARKED SUCCESS THIS YEAR.

5. COMMENT: ABOVE CONVERSATION WAS FIRST OCCASION ON WHICH BISHOP SAMUEL HAS EXPLICITLY ACCUSED SAUDI GOVERNMENT OF INTERFERING IN EGYPTIAN INTERNAL MATTERS. HE WAS QUITE EMPHATIC ON POINT, DISCOUNTING POSSIBILITY THAT FUNDS MIGHT COME FROM WEALTHY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS. ONLY GOVERNMENT, HE MAINTAINED, COULD TRANSFER AMOUNTS INVOLVED. HE PROFESSED PERPLEXITY AT REASON BEHIND SAUDI CAMPAIGN, ARGUING SAUDIS MUST WANT STABILITY IN EGYPT BUT ARE PROCEEDING IN MANNER CERTAIN TO DESTABILIZE SADAT'S REGIME. EILTS

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